

BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

1/3

May 21, 1940

Mr. F. H. Fairfield
Oseola Avenue
Clearwater, Florida

Dear Mr. Fairfield:

Recently I have become interested in the history of a concern you were connected with at one time here at Duxbury, The Standard Fertilizer Company. Of course this company failed years ago but as I am the Town Historian, without salary I may add, I thought it ought to be written up, so I am getting together all the facts I can. Miss Seever obtained your address from Mr. Gershom Chandler.

I got considerable information from a deaf and dumb man who worked for the company quite a few years, a Mr. Cook. However, there were certain things he couldn't supply me with. I think you may be interested in knowing that I have had pictures taken of the remains of the old wharf laid out to the channel. The piles are on a level with the sand but show quite plainly where the wharf was. On the western side of where the wharf was are the remains of a ship, evidently one of the vessels used at the factory.

I would be under great obligations if you would answer the following questions.

1. When was the factory established?
2. In what year did they bring suit against the company on the ground that it was a public nuisance?
3. What was the composition of the fertilizer? I had been given to understand that it was mixed with porgies.
4. Were the porgies ground up and mixed with other ingredients? If so, what were the ingredients?
5. Where did they obtain the porgies? We had a porgy house on the northern side of the Point where I live. They were seined in the river and brought to this house and a slab was cut from each side of the back bone. At one time they used these slabs for the oil which was tried out in big copper kettles. At another time they were used for bait.

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6. For what was this fertilizer used and what was its distribution?
7. How many men were employed in the factory?
8. What was the reason for giving up the manufacturing of the fertilizer?
9. When did they begin to make ivory black and how was that made? Mr. Smith, the man who owns the remnants around there, showed me a kind of stone which he said was used in the manufacture of this paint.
10. How long was the paint manufactured there and how long was it manufactured in Chelsea?
11. What was the reason that they gave up its manufacture?

Any other information about the manufacture of the fertilizer or the paint which you can furnish me will be greatly appreciated. Thanking you in advance for this information and I hope I am not imposing upon your nature too much, I remain

Sincerely yours,

309 Spring Court. 3/13
Clearwater, Fla. 5/25/40

Dear Dr. Peterson: Yours of the 21st rec'd.
and I am very willing to give you what
information I can, as it is 54 years since
I left Duxbury, my memory may be a trifle
out on some points. The only vessel we used
was the steamer "Acushnet" to transport goods
to and from Boston. The above steamer was a
gun boat during the Civil War. The Co. must have
sold her when they quit Duxbury.

I went with them in fall of 1882 and the best
they could do at that time, was a fertilizer
with 15 or 20 per cent of moisture, so I should
imagine they had only been going a few years,
a fertilizer with that % of moisture would
hardly be salable. From the time I went with
them until I left in '86 or early '87. we made a
product equal to any. The reason the quit was
lack of capital + enterprise to sell enough goods
to pay. They had hard competition against
such Companies as Bradley & Baker. Finally
sold out to Bradley. This answers your 8th question.
2- The suit was brought in '83. The Co. won -
3- Ingredients were phosphate rock. Potash. and various
forms of Nitrogen. Potash were not more than 5%

of total. Porgies were caught mainly for their oil content. The refuse was dried & ground, and sold to Fertilizers Cos. The N. content was low compared to Nitrate of Soda & Sulfate of Ammonia, but they were cheap fillers. Like dried tallow and blood. We used cod-fish skins from Gloucester at one time, until they began to use them to make glue. Then the price became too high for us.

Wed Church of Boston had a fleet of steamers that seined for porgies. Wherever they were found L. Is. Sound was a good place.

I should say we employed 12 to 15 men rather heavy on that. They began to make ivory black before I left. Probably early in '86, it was made at that time from bone char. which they obtained from Sugar Refineries. who used it for filtering purposes. They could only use it for a certain time as it got clogged, then they had to put in fresh char. The discard was sold to fertilizer Cos. as a source of N. What Mr. Smith saw was probably a piece of Phosphate Rock, which was the way it came from Florida, we ground it in a mill at the factory. I do not know just the date they moved to Chelsea. Miss Seaser might be able to tell you that; also when the Fertilizer Co was started.

suppose when Merce Seaser (who was then the owner of the the Chelsea Plant) died his widow sold the plant. not perhaps knowing much about the business.

I should think Miss Seaser could give you some dates, that I cannot. as I did not keep dates in my head after I left

The only thing I know about the Plant, is that they abandoned the method they used in Duxbury. when they moved to Chelsea, and ground the bone, that in a different way. I think Miss Seaser, is the last of her family alive, except a younger brother and I can see no reason why she should object to give you a little information. perhaps you have already seen her. I made a short call on her four years ago. If you see her, say "Doc" sends his love. Hoping you can get something from this ramble, I shall feel pleased.

Oct. 11. 1914

86 yrs old.
 old Mr. Seaser -

yours very truly,

J. H. Fairfield.

309 Spring Court
Clearwater, Fla 5/25/1940

Dear Dr. Peterson:

Yours of the 21st rec'd and I am very willing to give you what information I can, as it is 54 years since I left Duxbury. My memory may be a trifle out on some points. The only vessel we used was the steamer "Acushnet" to transport goods to and from Boston. The above steamer was a gunboat during the Civil War. The company must have sold her when they quit Duxbury.

I went with them in fall of 1882 and the best they could do at that time was a fertilizer with 15 or 20 per cent moisture, so I should imagine they had only been going a few years, a fertilizer with that % of moisture would hardly be salable. From the time I went with them until I left in '86 or early '87, we made a product equal to any. The reason they quit was lack of capital and enterprise to sell enough goods to pay. They had hard competition against such companies as Bradley and Brooker, finally sold out to Bradley. This answers your 8th question.

2. The suit was brought in "83. The company won.

3. Ingredients were phosphate rock, potash, and various forms of nitrogen. Porgies were not more than 5 % of total. Porgies were caught mainly for their oil content. The refuse was dried and ground, and sold to fertilizers companies. The N (nitrogen?) content, was low compared to nitrate of soda and sulphate of ammonia but they were cheap fillers, like dried taukage (?) and blood. We used cod-fish okius(?) from Gloucester at one time, until they began to use them to make glue, then the price became too high for us. Ned Church of Boston had a fleet of steamers that seined for porgies, where ever they were found, L.Is. Sound (Long Island Sound?) was a good place.

I should say we employed 12 to 15 men rather hazy on that. They began to make ivory black before I left, probably early in '86. It was made at that time from bone char, which they obtained from sugar refineries, who used it for filtering purposes. They could only use it for a certain time as it got clogged, then they had to put in fresh char. The discard was sold to fertilizer companies as source of n.(nitrogen?). What Mr. Smith saw was probably a piece of phosphate rock, which, was the way it came from Florida. We ground it in a mill at the factory. I do not know just the date they moved to Chelsea. Miss Seaver might be able to tell you that, also when the fertilizer company was started. I suppose when Mercer Seaver (who was then the owner of the Chelsea plant) died his widow sold the plant, not perhaps knowing much about the business.

I should think Miss Seaver could give you some dates, that I cannot, as I did not keep dates in my head after I left.

The only thing I know about the paint, is that they abandoned the method they used in Duxbury, when they moved to Chelsea, and ground the bone char in a different way. I think Miss Seaver is the last of her family alive, except a younger brother and I can see no reason why she should object to give you a little information...perhaps you have already seen her. I made a short call on her four years ago. If you see her, say "Doc" sends his love. Hoping you can get something from this ramble. I shall feel pleased.

Yours very truly,
F.H. Fairfield

(Oct 11, 1914 86 yrs, old. old Ms Seaver)

11/10
May 29, 1940

Mr. F. H. Fairfield
309 Spring Court
Clearwater, Florida

Dear Mr. Fairfield:

Thank you very much for your very informative letter in answer to my questions about the Standard Fertilizer Company. Upon its receipt I telephoned Miss Seaver, gave her your message, and asked her for some missing dates which she is going to try and get from Mrs. Mercer Seaver, who is the only one of the family alive according to her. Her youngest brother died a few months ago.

I just wonder if the bones of the vessel showing along the side of the remnants of the wharf may not be the steamer Acushnet. As I think I told you, this ship was on the western side of the wharf on the bottom. What makes me think it may be the gunboat is that it seems to be wider than the ordinary vessel which is my idea of a gunboat. I think the supposition that it may be the remains of this vessel is strengthened by the fact that you say that was the only boat used to transport the goods to and from Boston.

Perhaps they didn't sell her and she may have gracefully sunk in the course of time after the fertilizer factory was abandoned. Mr. Smith gave me a wooden block print of the plant and when I was over at the Old Colony Memorial Press I had them strike off one. If you have none, I should be very glad to send you one. The cut shows the Standard Fertilizer Company with the wharf and the barrels. Rather a good illustration.

Again thanking you for the information, I remain

Sincerely yours,

6/3/40

8/13

Dear Dr. Peterson,

Yours of 27th recd. I should be very glad to have one of those blocks you speak of. The Accumbet always lived up at the end of the wharf. I do not think there was water enough to float her on the side. As at low tide, it was bare ground. nearly out to the channel, which came by the end of wharf. unless the boat was pretty well wrecked. The stack and pilot-house, and stateroom back of it, ought to show. There was a steamer, passages ran from Boston to Hedy Shoals. I do not know that the Co. owned her. I know Mr Jacob Seaver owned most of her, if not all.

Yours Sincerely -

F. H. Fairfield.

6/3/40 (1940)

Dear Dr. Peterson,

Yours of 29th etc. (?)rec'd. I should be very glad to have one of those blocks you speak of. The Acushnet always laid up at the end of the wharf. I do not think there was water enough to float her on the side as at low tide, it was bare ground, nearly out to the channel, which came by the end of the wharf, unless the boat was pretty well wrecked. The stack and pilothouse and stateroom back of it ought to show. There was a steamer, passenger ran from Boston to Isle of Shoals. I do not know that the company owned her. I know Mr. Jacob Seaver owned most of her, if not all.

Yours sincerely,
F.H. Fairfield

19/13

NO..... (CQ)

(EMP)

U. S. NAVY YARD. BOSTON

3 July 1940

Dr. Reuben Peterson
Powder Point
Duxbury, Massachusetts

My dear Sir:

Answer to your letter of June 24 has been delayed in the hope that there might be some record here of the old ACUSHNET. No such record, however, is found.

In the volume entitled "Ships Data", upon which we rely for such information, there is a section which gives historical data. In the case of each ship now in the Navy, the historical data is given as to former ships of the same name. Although there is now an ocean-going tug of the name ACUSHNET (taken over from the Coast Guard in 1936) no previous vessel of the same name is mentioned.

I am sorry I can only suggest that the Boston Public Library may have some means of tracing the history of the vessel in which you are interested.

Very truly yours,


W. T. Tarrant
Rear Admiral, USN, Commandant

11/13

July 11, 1940

Mr. F. H. Fairchild
Oleola Avenue
Clearwater, Florida

Dear Mr. Fairchild:

Enclosed please find two photographs which I imagine will be of interest to you. At low tide one can make out the stumps of the piles which mark the old wharf leading to the channel and to the west of this wharf are the bones of a vessel, presumably engaged in some of the trade that went on in your day.

These bones of the old vessel on the bottom of the bay are plainly visible at low tide. So much so that I have had a picture taken of them. Perhaps you can help me in identifying this old vessel. Could it have been the gunboat you spoke of? Evidently it is not a scow since in that case the cross timbers would have been flat and these curve upwards. Except in the extreme ends of the timbers, they were held together by wooden spikes. The holes in the timbers show this. At the extreme ends there were brass spikes.

I shall be very glad to receive from you any additional information positive or assumed about this old boat.

I thought you would be interested to receive an enlargement of a picture of the father of your old boss. His daughter, Miss Susan Seaver, almost cried when I gave it to her. It is the only picture they have of the father.

Thanking you for much information given me about the porgy factory, I remain

Sincerely yours,

12/13

July 24, 1940

Commandant
Charlestown Navy Yard
Charlestown, Massachusetts

Dear Sir:

About forty years ago a fertilizer factory was erected on the southern Standish Shore by a man by the name of Seaver. He and his sons put a lot of money into it, something like \$100,000. They made this fertilizer for a number of years, packing it in barrels and transporting it in an old gunboat. The name of this boat was the Acushnet.

I just wondered if you had any information regarding a gunboat by that name. I don't know what became of her, although it was supposed that she was sold when the company failed and the factory was transferred to Chelsea for the purpose of making paint.

Why I am so interested in this is that there is an old vessel on the bottom of the bay along side of what was a wharf which was made running out into the channel. The skeleton of this boat resting in the bay is approximately fifty-five feet long and about fifteen or twenty feet wide. The timbers are very heavy and were evidently put together by wooden pegs.

I am curious to obtain some information about this old boat, thinking possibly she may be a small gunboat or a barge. If you can furnish me with any reference about gunboats I would be under obligations. Thanking you in advance for anything you may be able to tell me, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Duxbury Town Historian

13/13

NAVY DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF
NAVAL RECORDS AND LIBRARY

RMD

WASHINGTON, D. C.

7 August 1940.

My dear Captain:

With reference to your letter of August 2d. regarding possible naval service of a wooden vessel named the ACUSHNET, whose frames are lying on the New England shore, we have been unable to find a record of any vessel serving in the Navy under this name.

There were great numbers of vessels taken into the Navy during the Civil War whose names were changed when purchased, but we have found no reference to an ACUSHNET being taken over in such fashion. Neither is there a vessel of this name listed among the ships chartered by the Quarter Master Corps of the Army.


In the "List of merchant vessels of the United States for the year ending June 30, 1868" (the earliest volume in our library), there is listed a screw steamer ACUSHNET of 325.04 tons (official No. 641) whose home port was New Bedford, Massachusetts. The latest "List" in which the name of this vessel appears is that for the year ending June 30, 1874, which would seem to indicate that she passed out of existence during the following year.

Additional information concerning this ship might be obtained from the Treasury Department or the Department of Commerce. If anything is found to indicate that she had naval service under another name we will be very glad to make a further search.

It is also suggested that, a fairly close date for her wrecking having been established, local newspapers of the period might contain accounts of her loss.

With many kind regards,

Very sincerely,


D. W. KNOX,
Captain, U.S.N. (Ret.)
Officer-in-Charge.

Captain R. A. Dawes, USN(Ret.)
Hdqtrs. First Naval District,
U.S. Navy Yard,
Boston, Massachusetts.